Secure EPC Gen2 compliant Radio Frequency Identification

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Abstract. The increased functionality of EPC Class1 Gen2 (EPCGen2) is making this standard a de facto specification for inexpensive tags in the RFID industry. Recently three EPCGen2 compliant protocols that address security issues were proposed in the literature. In this paper we analyze these protocols and show that they are not secure and subject to replay/impersonation and statistical analysis attacks. We then propose an EPCGen2 compliant RFID protocol that uses the numbers drawn from synchronized pseudorandom number generators (RNG) to provide secure tag identification and session unlinkability. This protocol is optimistic and its security reduces to the (cryptographic) pseudorandomness of the RNGs supported by EPCGen2.

Keywords: EPCGen2 compliance, security, identification, unlinkability.

1 Introduction

Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) is a promising new technology that is widely deployed for supply-chain and inventory management, retail operations and more generally for automatic identification. The advantage of RFID over barcode technology is that it is wireless and does not require direct line-of-sight reading. Furthermore, RFID readers can interrogate tags at greater distances, faster and concurrently.

One of the most important advantages of RFID technology is that tags have read/write capability, allowing stored tag information to be altered dynamically. Typically an RFID system consists of tags, one or more readers, and a backend server. The communication channel between the reader and the backend server is assumed to be secure while the wireless channel between the reader and the tag is assumed to be insecure.

To promote the adoption of RFID technology and to support interoperability, EPCGlobal [11] and the International Organization for Standards (ISO) [13] have been actively engaged in defining standards for tags, readers, and the communication protocols. A recently ratified standard is EPC Class 1 Gen 2 (EPCGen2). This defines a platform for the interoperability of RFID protocols, by supporting efficient tag reading, flexible bandwidth use, multiple read/write capabilities and basic reliability guarantees, provided by an on-chip 16-bit Pseudo-random Number Generator (RNG) and a 16-bit Cyclic Redundancy Code (CRC16). EPCGen2 is designed to strike a balance between cost and functionality, with little attention paid to security.

In this paper we are concerned with the security of EPCGen2 compliant protocols. Clearly one has to take into account the additional cost for introducing security into systems with restricted capability. It is important therefore to employ lightweight cryptographic protocols that are compatible with the existing standardized specifications. Several RFID authentication protocols that address security issues using cryptographic mechanisms have been proposed in the literature. Most of these use hash functions [20, 18, 24, 2, 9, 22, 10, 17], which are beyond the capability of most low-cost tags and are not supported by EPCGen2. Some protocols use pseudorandom number generators (RNG) [24, 14, 5, 4, 23, 3], a mechanism that is supported by EPCGen2, but these are not optimized for EPCGen2 compliance. One can also use the RNG supported by EPCGen2 as a pseudorandom function (PRF) (as in [3, 12]) to link challenge-response flows, however it is not clear if such protocols are vulnerable to *related key* attacks [3].

The research literature for RFID security is extensive. We refrain from a detailed review, and refer the reader to a comprehensive repository available online at [1]. Recently three RFID authentication protocols specifically designed for compliance with EPCGen2 have been proposed [7, 19, 21]. These combine the CRC-16 of the EPCGen2 standard with its 16-bit RNG to hash, randomize and link protocol flows, and to prevent cloning, impersonation and denial of service attacks. In this paper we analyze these protocols and show that they do not achieve their security goals. One may argue that, because the EPCGen2 standard supports only a very basic RNG, any RFID protocol that complies with this standard is potentially vulnerable, for example to ciphertext-only attacks that exhaust the range of the components of protocol flows. While this is certainly the case, such attacks may be checked by using additional keying material and by constraining the application (e.g., the life-time of tags). We contend that there is scope for securing low cost devices. Obviously, the level of security may not be sufficient for sensitive applications. However there are many low cost applications where there is no alternative.

The rest of this paper is organized as follows. Section 2 introduces the EPCGen2 standard focusing on security issues. Section 3 analyzes three recently proposed EPCGen2 protocols. In Section 4 we propose a novel EPCGen2 compliant protocol that provides tag identification and session unlinkability. In Section 5 we define a security framework for Radio Frequency Identification, and show that our protocol is secure in this framework.

2 The EPCGen2 standard

EPC Global UHF Class 1 Gen 2, commonly known as the EPCGen2, was approved in 2004, and ratified by ISO as an amendment to the 18000-6 standard in 2006. This standard defines the physical and logical requirements for a passive-backscatter, Interrogator-talks-first (ITF), radio-frequency identification (RFID) system operating in the 860 MHz - 960 MHz frequency range. The EPCGen2 standard defines a protocol with two layers, the physical and the Tag-identification layer, which specify the physical interactions, the operating procedures and commands, and the collision arbitration scheme used to identify a Tag in a multiple-Tag environment.

The system comprises Interrogators, also known as Readers, and Tags. Below we briefly summarize the EPCGen2 requirements.

1. Physical Layer
   - Communications are half-duplex, meaning that Interrogators and Tags cannot talk simultaneously.
   - An Interrogator transmits information to a Tag by modulating an RF signal. Tags are passive, meaning that they receive all of their operating energy from the Interrogator's RF waveform, as well as information.
   - An Interrogator receives information from a Tag by transmitting a continuous wave (CW) RF signal to the Tag; the Tag responds only after being directed to do so by an Interrogator, by modulating the reflection coefficient of its antenna, thereby backscattering a weak signal.
2. Tag memory is logically separated into four distinct banks
   - Reserved memory that contains a 32-bit kill password (KP) to permanently disable the tag, and a 32-bit access password (AP) used when the Interrogator wants to write/read the memory.
   - EPC memory that contains the parameters of a CRC16 (16 bits), protocol control (PC) bits (16 bits), and an electronic product code EPC that identifies the Tag (32 bits).
   - TID memory that contains sufficient information to identify to a Reader the (custom/optional) features of the tag and tag/vendor specific data.
   - User memory that allows user-specific data storage
3. Tag-identification layer
   - An Interrogator manages Tag populations using three basic operations: *Select* (the operation of choosing a Tag population), *Inventory* (the operation of identifying Tags) and *Access* (the operation of reading from and/or writing to a Tag).
   - The Interrogator begins an inventory round by transmitting a Query command in one of four sessions. An inventory operates in only one session at a time, and the Interrogator inventories Tags within that session.
   - A random-slotted collision algorithm is used. The Interrogator sends a parameter Q, that is an integer in the range $(0, 15)$; the Tags load a random Q-bit number into a slot counter. Tags decrement this slot counter when they receive a Query, and reply to the Interrogator when

their counter reaches zero. When the Interrogator detects the reply of a Tag, it requests its PC, EPC, and CRC16.
   - Link cover-coding can be used to obscure information during Reader to Tag transmissions. To cover-code data (or a password), an Interrogator first requests a random number from the Tag. Then, the Interrogator performs a bit-wise XOR of the data with this random number, and transmits the result (cover coded or ciphertext) to the Tag.
4. Hardware requirements
   - A 16-bit Pseudo-Random number generator (RNG).
   - A 16-bit Cyclic Redundancy Code.

2.1 The Pseudo-Random Number Generator

A pseudorandom number generator (RNG) is a deterministic function that outputs a sequence of numbers that are indistinguishable from random numbers by using as input a random binary string, called *seed.* The length of the random seed must be selected carefully to guarantee that the numbers generated are pseudorandom. The state of the RNG changes each time that a new random number is drawn. Although EPCGen2 does not specify any structure for the RNG, it defines the following randomness criteria.

1. **Probability of RN16**: The probability that a pseudorandom number RN16 drawn from the RNG has value RN is bounded by:

$$0.8/2^{16} < Prob(RN16 = RN) < 1.25/2^{16}.$$

2. **Drawing identical sequences**: For a tag population of up to 10,000 tags, the probability that any two or more tags simultaneously draw the same sequence of RN16s is $< 0.1\%$, regardless of when the tags are energized.
3. **Next-number prediction**: A RN16 drawn from a tag's RNG is not predictable with probability better than 0.025%, given the outcomes of all prior draws.

We refer the reader to the discussion in [3] regarding the strength of EPCGen2 compliant RNGs.

2.2 The 16-bit Cyclic Redundancy Code

Cyclic Redundancy Codes (CRC) are error-detecting codes that check accidental (non-malicious) errors caused by faults during transmission. To compute the CRC of a bit string $B = (B_0, B_1, \ldots, B_{m-1})$ we first represent it by a polynomial $B(x) = B_0 + B_1 x + \cdots + B_{m-1} x^{m-1}$ over the finite field $GF(2)$, and then compute its remainder: $CRC(B(x)) = (B(x) \cdot x^n) \bmod g(x)$, for an appropriate generator polynomial $g(x)$ of degree n.

EPCGen2 uses the CRC-CCITT generator: $x^{16} + x^{12} + x^5 + 1$, and XORs a fixed bit pattern to the bitstream to be checked. EPCGen2 specifies the Cyclic Redundancy Code CRC16 which, for a 16-bit number B is defined by:

$$CRC(B) = [\, B(x) \cdot x^{16} + \sum_{i=16}^{31} x^i \,] \bmod g(x) = B(x)x^{16} \bmod g(x) \; + \; CRC(0),$$

where $CRC(0) = \sum_{16}^{31} x^i \bmod g(x)$ is a fixed polynomial. Since the modulo $g(x)$ operator is a homomorphism, CRC16 inherits strong linearity aspects. More specifically, if P, Q are 16-bit numbers, then

$$CRC(P(x) + Q(x)) = CRC(P(x)) + CRC(Q(x)) + CRC(0). \qquad (1)$$

It follows that the CRC16 of a sequence of numbers can be computed from the CRC16s of the numbers. Consequently CRC16 by itself will not protect data against intentional (malicious) alteration. Its functionality is to support strong error detection particularly with respect to burst errors, not security.

3 Weaknesses recently proposed EPCGen2 compliant RFID protocols

In this section we consider three recently proposed EPCGen2 compliant protocols: the Chen-Deng mutual authentication protocol [7], the Quinling-Yiju-Yonghua minimalist mutual authentication protocol [19], and the Sun-Ting authentication protocol [21]. We show that these protocols fall short of their claimed security.

In the protocols below we use the following notation: $\mathcal{S}$ is the back end server, $\mathcal{R}$ a Reader, $\mathcal{T}$ a tag. We assume that $\mathcal{S}$ and $\mathcal{R}$ are linked with a secure channel, and for simplicity, only consider the case when the authentication is online.

3.1 Analysis of the Chen-Deng protocol

In the Chen-Deng mutual authentication protocol [7] each tag $\mathcal{T}$ shares three private values with the back end server $\mathcal{S}$: a key K, a nonce N and an EPC identifier. The tag stores these in non-volatile memory and the server stores them in a database DB. The protocol has three passes:

1. $\mathcal{S} \Rightarrow \mathcal{R} \rightarrow \mathcal{T}$: query, R_r, a random number, and $P = CRC(N \oplus R_r)$.
   $\mathcal{T}$: Check that P is correct. If it is correct,
2. $\mathcal{T} \rightarrow \mathcal{R} \Rightarrow \mathcal{S}$: R_t, a random number, $X = (K \oplus EPC \oplus R_t)$ and
   $Y = CRC(N \oplus X \oplus R_t)$.
   $\mathcal{S}$: Check that X, Y are correct. If they are correct,
3. $\mathcal{S} \Rightarrow \mathcal{R} \rightarrow \mathcal{T}$: M_{resp}, a response message.

This protocol is clearly subject to a replay attack since the flows from the Reader $\mathcal{R}$ and tag $\mathcal{T}$ use independent randomness (and hence are independent). In fact the adversary needs only one interrogation of $\mathcal{T}$: R_t, $X = (K \oplus EPC \oplus R_t)$ and $Y = CRC(N \oplus X \oplus R_t)$, to impersonate the tag by computing a valid (R_a, X^*, Y^*), for any random number R_a, as: $X^* = X \oplus (R_t \oplus R_a)$, $Y^* = Y$.

3.2 Analysis of the Quinling-Yiju-Yonghua protocol

The Quinling-Yiju-Yonghua protocol is a challenge-response mutual authentication protocol [19]. Each tag $\mathcal{T}$ shares two private 32-bit values with the back end server $\mathcal{S}$: an access password aPW and a tag identifier $TID = TID_h||TID_l$, where TID_h (TID_l) are the high 16-bits (low 16-bits) of TID. $\mathcal{T}$ stores these in non-volatile memory and $\mathcal{S}$ stores them in a database DB. The protocol has three passes.

1. $\mathcal{S} \Rightarrow \mathcal{R} \rightarrow \mathcal{T}$: query, and R_r, a 16-bit random number.
2. $\mathcal{T} \rightarrow \mathcal{R} \Rightarrow \mathcal{S}$: R_t, a 16-bit random number, and $M = (M_l||M_h) \oplus aPW$, where $M_l = CRC(TID_l \oplus R_r \oplus R_t)$ and $M_h = CRC(TID_h \oplus R_r \oplus R_t)$.
   $\mathcal{S}$: Check that M is correct. If so, the tag is accepted as the authorized $\mathcal{T}$,
3. $\mathcal{S} \Rightarrow \mathcal{R} \rightarrow \mathcal{T}$: $N = (N_l||N_h) \oplus aPW$, where $N_l = CRC(TID_l \oplus R_t)$ and $N_h = CRC(TID_h \oplus R_t)$.
   $\mathcal{T}$: Check that N is correct. If it is, it accepts that $\mathcal{R}$ is an authorized reader.

In this protocol the flows from the tag $\mathcal{T}$ and Reader $\mathcal{R}$ use combined randomness and are dependent. Therefore one cannot use an identical flow for a replay attack. However, because of the strong linearity aspects of CRC16, it is easy for the adversary to modify the protocol flows from an interrogation of $\mathcal{T}$ to get the flow for a replay attack. Suppose that the adversary is given: R_r, R_t and M from a previous successful interrogation; and let R_r^* be the 16-bit random challenge of the Reader for a new interrogation. Then the adversary $\mathcal{A}$ can choose any 16-bit random number, R_a, and compute: $A = CRC(R_r \oplus R_r^* \oplus R_a) \oplus CRC(0)$, and send a valid response to $\mathcal{S}$:

$$R_t^* = R_t \oplus R_a \ , \ M^* = M \oplus (A||A),$$

since $M_l^* = M_l \oplus A$ and $M_h^* = M_h \oplus A$, by Equations (1). Therefore the tag $\mathcal{T}$ can be cloned after an eavesdropped interrogation. Impersonating the Reader is even simpler: $\mathcal{A}$ does not need a previous interrogation. $\mathcal{A}$ sends any value R_r^* to an authorized tag $\mathcal{T}$ to get M^* from $\mathcal{T}$. Then, $\mathcal{A}$ can compute a valid $N^* = M^* \oplus (A'||A')$, where $A' = CRC(R_r^*) \oplus CRC(0)$.

3.3 Analysis of the Sun-Ting Gen2$^+$ protocol

Gen2$^+$ [21] is a four pass mutual authentication protocol. Each tag shares with the back end server $\mathcal{S}$ a random l-word string k ($l \leq 127$) called *keypool*. $\mathcal{S}$ stores the keypool of each tag $\mathcal{T}$ together with its EPC and other identifying data in a database DB. In the protocol $\mathcal{T}$ gets identified by revealing information about its keypool, which $\mathcal{S}$ uses to locate the tag in DB. The keypool of each tag is updated every 14 successful authentications to prevent cloning attacks. We briefly describe the protocol.

1. $\mathcal{R} \rightarrow \mathcal{T}$: query
   $\mathcal{T}$: Draw a 16-bit pseudorandom number, and use the first 14 bits as 7-bit addresses, a and b, to mark a segment $k[a:b]$ of the keypool, and the last two bits to compute a *check* by XORing the two lsb of the a-th word and the b-th word. If $a \geq b$, the segment $k[a:b]$ contains the words from a to b, otherwise $k[a:b] = k[a:l-1]||k[0:b]$.
2. $\mathcal{T} \rightarrow \mathcal{R} \Rightarrow \mathcal{S}$: $a, b,$ *check*
   $\mathcal{S}$: First compute *check* for every $k \in DB$, and remove those keypools k with different *check*. Then compute the $CRC(k[a:b])$ of all remaining keypools in the reduced database DB', and finally compute the *central key* ck', whose bits are obtained by taking a majority vote in the corresponding positions of the $CRC(k[a:b])$ in DB' (0 dominates 1).
3. $\mathcal{S} \Rightarrow \mathcal{R} \rightarrow \mathcal{T}$: ck'
   $\mathcal{T}$: Compute $ck = CRC(k[a:b])$ for the locally stored keypool and compare it with ck': if their Hamming distance is greater than a threshold t (typically $t = 1$) do not respond. Otherwise, send the locally stored EPC.
4. $\mathcal{T} \rightarrow \mathcal{R}$: nothing or EPC
   $\mathcal{S}$: If there is no response from $\mathcal{T}$ then remove from DB' those keypools k for which the Hamming distance of CRC($k[a:b]$) from ck' is less or equal to t, and repeat Step 1.
   If the EPC of one of the tags $\mathcal{T}$ in DB is received, then $\mathcal{T}$ is identified, and $\mathcal{R}$ is considered authentic by the tag.

This protocol is clearly subject to replay attacks because only the tag contributes to the randomness of protocol flows. The adversary $\mathcal{A}$ needs to eavesdrop on only one tag interrogation to get the required protocol flows. The protocol is also subject to a more complex statistical attack in which $\mathcal{A}$ first eavesdrops on a number of tag interrogations and then replays the tag flows to the Reader $\mathcal{R}$, changing adaptively the last challenge. This makes it possible for $\mathcal{A}$ to build up gradually sufficient information about the CRC's of the words in a tag's keypool so as to clone the tag. Below we describe the attack in more detail.

1. $\mathcal{A}$ eavesdrops on $m < 14$ successful interrogations of $\mathcal{T}$ (prior to a keypool update). $\mathcal{A}$ stores for every interrogation the values:

   $$([a, b, check]_1, ck'_1), ([a, b, check]_2, ck'_2), \ldots, ([a, b, check]_p, ck'_p),$$

   where p is the number of challenges in the interrogation ($p \approx \log(T)/log(4)$, where T is the total number of tags).
2. $\mathcal{A}$ impersonates $\mathcal{T}$ and replays all but one of the challenges in each interrogation. The last challenge is replaced by $[x, x, 00]_p$, $0 \leq x \leq l$. $\mathcal{R}$ responds with x' computed by taking a majority vote on the $CRC(k[x:x])$ for all

keypools k in the reduced DB'. Note that repeating the first $(p-1)$ rounds guarantees that the target tag is always in DB'. $\mathcal{A}$ repeats this step for each one of the l words of the *keypool*.

3. $\mathcal{A}$ analyzes the collected data. Let n be the number of keypools remaining in DB' after the penultimate round $(p-1)$. $\mathcal{A}$ can compute the CRC16 of the word x in the keypool of $\mathcal{T}$, because of the binary structure of ck': e.g., when $n=1$ then $ck' = CRC(x)$ and when $n=2$, ck' is strongly biased with 3/4 of its bits being 0. The case $n=2$ is particularly important because it occurs with high probability ($> 48\%$, for $T=1000$, $l=127$, and $t=1$). Using this information it is now possible to compute the $CRC(w)$ of the word w in the keypool of $\mathcal{T}$.
4. $\mathcal{A}$ now impersonates $\mathcal{R}$ to $\mathcal{T}$ and tries to compute a valid ck' for a given $[a, b, check]$. By exploiting the linearity aspects of CRC16, the CRC16 of an interval $k[a:b] = w_a \cdots w_b$ can be computed from the CRC16s of its words:

$$CRC(k[a:b]) = \bigoplus_{i=a}^{b} CRC^{i-a+1}(w_i) \oplus \bigoplus_{1}^{(b-a-1)} CRC^{i}(0),$$

where CRC^i is CRC iterated i-times. Note also that there is no bound on the number of times that $\mathcal{A}$ can try to compute a valid ck', since the number of challenges in an interrogation is not bounded.

This attack can be modified and enhanced in different ways. For example, $\mathcal{A}$ could use the different tydbit *check*s sent by the tag to guess the values of the lsb of different words, or ask for intervals of different length and combine this with the previous analyzed data. $\mathcal{A}$ could also simplify the attack, by trying to find the CRC of only short block words, and then wait until $\mathcal{T}$ asks for an interval that can be made from these blocks.

4 Gen2Sec: a Secure EPCGen2 compliant RFID protocol

We next consider a novel Radio Frequency Identification protocol, Gen2Sec, which only uses the RNG supported by EPCGen2 for security.

4.1 The protocol

In our protocol each tag $\mathcal{T}$ is identified by drawing consecutive numbers from its RNG, say g_{tag}. $\mathcal{T}$ draws three numbers, RN_1, RN_2, RN_3, and sends RN_1 to the server $\mathcal{S}$ as a commitment. If $\mathcal{S}$ shares the RNG of the tag (its current state), and if both RNGs are synchronized, then $\mathcal{S}$ can also draw these same numbers. It can therefore reply to the tag with the challenge RN_2. $\mathcal{T}$ now sends RN_3 as its response. This third step is also used to keep the RNGs of $\mathcal{S}$ and $\mathcal{T}$ synchronized. One more challenge-response round is needed to deal with replay attacks when these are detected (an *alarm* triggers this): $\mathcal{S}$ then draws and sends the next number RN_4 as challenge and $\mathcal{T}$ responds by sending RN_5.

Altogether three numbers are drawn when the adversary is passive and five when the adversary is active. The security of the protocol is based on the fact that the random numbers sent by the tag cannot be predicted by the adversary, and consecutive numbers drawn in each interrogation are pseudorandom. Our protocol *identifies tags* (not Readers) and is provably secure. It offers a degree of *privacy* (session unlinkability), as we shall see in the following section.

We now describe the protocol in detail. Each tag $\mathcal{T}$ shares with the back end server $\mathcal{S}$ an identifier ID_{tag}, its RNG g_{tag} (the state of g_{tag}) and at least one pseudorandom number (this guarantees synchronization). $\mathcal{S}$ stores in a database for each tag a list of seven numbers, ID_{tag} and g_{tag}:

$$DB = \{RN_1^{old}, RN_1^{cur}, RN_1^{next}, RN_2, RN_3, RN_4^{cur}, RN_5^{cur}; ID_{tag}, g_{tag}\}.$$

The lists of DB are doubly indexed by RN_1^{next} and RN_1^{cur} respectively. The tag $\mathcal{T}$ stores in non-volatile memory two pseudorandom numbers, its identifier and (the seed for) g_{tag}:

$$(RN_1, RN_2, ID_{tag}, g_{tag}).$$

To initialize the values of its variables, the tag draws two successive values RN_1, RN_2 from g_{tag}. $\mathcal{S}$ draws six successive numbers from the RNG of each tag and assigns their values to the variable in the tags lists: RN_1^{cur}, RN_2, RN_3, RN_4^{cur}, RN_5^{cur}, RN_1^{next} (in this order). In the protocol $\mathcal{S}$ uses a *timer* and an *alarm* to manage inventories, thwart man-in-the-middle relay attacks (see Section 5.2) and avoid replay attacks, as well as an *update* function in which: $RN_1^{cur} \leftarrow RN_1^{next}$, and the five values $RN_2, RN_3, RN_4^{cur}, RN_5^{cur}, RN_1^{next}$, are updated by drawing new numbers from g_{tag}.

Gen2Sec Protocol

1. $\mathcal{R} \rightarrow \mathcal{T}$: query
2. $\mathcal{T} \rightarrow \mathcal{R} \Rightarrow \mathcal{S}$: RN_1
   $\mathcal{S}$: Check in DB
   If $RN_1 = RN_1^{cur}$ for an item in DB then:
      If $RN_1 = RN_1^{old}$ then set $alarm \leftarrow 1$, set $timer$ and broadcast RN_2.
      Else set $RN_1^{old} \leftarrow RN_1$, set $alarm \leftarrow 0$, set $timer$ and broadcast RN_2.
   If $RN_1 = RN_1^{next}$ for an item in DB then $RN^{old} \leftarrow RN_1$, $update$,
      set $alarm \leftarrow 0$, set $timer$ and broadcast RN_2.
3. $\mathcal{S} \Rightarrow \mathcal{R} \rightarrow \mathcal{T}$: RN_2
   $\mathcal{T}$: Check RN_2.
   If RN_2 is valid then draw five successive numbers from g_{tag} and assign them to the variables RN_3, RN_4, RN_5 (volatile), RN_1, RN_2, and broadcast RN_3.
   $\mathcal{S}$: On timeout abort.
4. $\mathcal{T} \rightarrow \mathcal{R} \Rightarrow \mathcal{S}$: RN_3
   $\mathcal{S}$: Check RN_3.
   If RN_3 is valid for ID_{tag} then:
      If $alarm = 0$ then $update$ and ACCEPT the tag as ID_{tag}.

Else set $RN_4 \leftarrow RN_4^{cur}$, $RN_5 \leftarrow RN_5^{cur}$, $update$, and broadcast RN_4.
Else abort.

5. $\mathcal{S} \Rightarrow \mathcal{R} \rightarrow \mathcal{T}$: RN_4

   $\mathcal{T}$: Check RN_4.
   If it is valid then broadcast RN_5.
   $\mathcal{S}$: On timeout abort.

6. $\mathcal{T} \rightarrow \mathcal{R} \Rightarrow \mathcal{S}$: RN_5

   $\mathcal{S}$: Check RN_5.
   If RN_5 is valid for ID_{tag} then ACCEPT the $\mathcal{T}$ has identifier ID_{tag}.
   Else abort.

This protocol is *optimistic* in the sense that a tag $\mathcal{T}$ need only use three pseudorandom numbers to get identified when the adversary $\mathcal{A}$ is passive. $\mathcal{T}$ sends a commitment in Pass 1, $\mathcal{S}$ sends a challenge in Pass 2, and $\mathcal{T}$ gets identified in Pass 3. $\mathcal{A}$ may try to impersonate $\mathcal{T}$ by obtaining the flows RN_1, RN_2, RN_3, through an offline man-in-the-middle attack (see Section 5.2 for a discussion on such attacks). However this would cause the Server $\mathcal{S}$ to activate the $alarm$. When this happens an additional interrogation is needed (Pass 5 and Pass 6). If $\mathcal{A}$ attempts to replay the numbers $RN_1, RN_2, RN_3, RN_4, RN_4, RN_5$, $\mathcal{A}$ will fail because in the mean time $\mathcal{S}$ and $\mathcal{T}$ will have updated the locally stored values of the pseudorandom numbers.

Refreshing the RNG of a tag. We are assuming that it is hard to predict a number drawn from a tag's RNG given the outcomes of (all) prior draws—Condition 3, Section 2.1. If this is an issue then one could refresh the (volatile bits of the) seed of the RNG with randomness from the Server $\mathcal{S}$. For example, in Pass 3 of the protocol one could replace RN_2 by: $(R \oplus RN_2,\ g_{tag}(R))$, where R is a random string selected by $\mathcal{S}$ and $g_{tag}(R)$ the refreshed RNG. To maintain synchrony the Server $\mathcal{S}$ should use the refreshed $g_{tag}(R)$ in the *update* in Pass 2, and the tag must update the values RN_1, RN_2 using the refreshed $g_{tag}(R)$.

In the following section we will discuss the security issues of this protocol in a formal framework.

5 A security framework for RFID

5.1 RFID deployments

A typical RFID deployment involves tags $\mathcal{T}$, Readers $\mathcal{R}$ and a back end Server $\mathcal{S}$. Tags are wireless transponders that typically have no power of their own and respond only when they are in an electromagnetical field, while Readers are transceivers that generate such fields. Readers implement a radio interface to the tags and a high level interface to a back end server. $\mathcal{S}$ is a trusted entity that processes private tag data. Readers do not store locally any private data.

$\mathcal{T}$, $\mathcal{R}$ and $\mathcal{S}$ are abstracted as probabilistic Turing machines, although it is assumed that the tags have severely restrained resources, and the Readers do not store any private tag information. This model describes the setting for authorized parties, who adhere to protocol executions. The adversary is not bound by this constraint.

5.2 Threat model

We adopt the Byzantine threat model. The adversary $\mathcal{A}$ is modeled as a probabilistic Turing machine, and controls the delivery schedule of all communication channels, and may eavesdrop into, or modify, their contents. $\mathcal{A}$ may also instantiate new communication channels and directly interact with honest parties ($\mathcal{R}$ or $\mathcal{T}$). However the channels that link $\mathcal{S}$, $\mathcal{R}$ are assumed to be secure. There are several general types of adversarial attacks. We list the more important ones below.

1. *Tag disabling.* These are availability (DoS) attacks in which the adversary $\mathcal{A}$ causes tags to assume a state from which they can no longer function properly. Desynchronizing attacks are disabling attacks in which tags become either temporarily or permanently incapacitated.
2. *Tag cloning.* These are integrity attacks in which $\mathcal{A}$ succeeds in capturing the identifying data of a tag.
3. *Tag tracking.* These are privacy attacks in which $\mathcal{A}$ can trace tags through rogue readers.
4. *Replay attacks.* These are integrity attacks in which $\mathcal{A}$ uses a tag's response to a Reader's challenge to impersonate the tag.
5. *Offline man-in-the-middle attacks.* These are attacks in which a rogue reader $\mathcal{R}'$ and a rogue tag $\mathcal{T}'$ interpose between an authorized tag $\mathcal{T}$ and Reader $\mathcal{R}$ so that, when $\mathcal{R}'$ challenges $\mathcal{T}$ appropriately in $\mathcal{T} \leftrightarrow \mathcal{R}'$ the data obtained will leak private information of $\mathcal{T}$ when input to $\mathcal{T}' \leftrightarrow \mathcal{R} \Leftrightarrow \mathcal{S}$.

When designing secure RFID protocols one should also take into account attacks that are excluded from the security model used. Sometimes these attacks may be prevented by using "out-of-system" protection mechanisms. Of course, it is preferable to deal with such attacks within the model. Below we list two such attacks:

- *Power analysis attacks* (*side-channel attacks*) [16]. These are attacks in which the private key of a device is extracted by exploiting either its power consumption when inaccurate/accurate received bits are processed or the variations in the timing of its energy output.
- *Man-in-the-middle relay attacks* [8, 15]. These are online attacks in which an adversarial reader $\mathcal{R}'$ and tag $\mathcal{T}'$ interpose between $\mathcal{T}$ and $\mathcal{R}$ so that, the authentication flow $\mathcal{T} \leftrightarrow \mathcal{R} \Leftrightarrow \mathcal{S}$ is diverted to a flow $\mathcal{T} \leftrightarrow \mathcal{R}' \leftrightarrow \mathcal{T}' \leftrightarrow \mathcal{R} \Leftrightarrow \mathcal{S}$ that authenticates the imposter $\mathcal{T}'$ using the authentication data of $\mathcal{T}$.

5.3 Security definitions

Definition 1. An RFID protocol is *secure* if, for any $\varepsilon > 0$, and any adversary $\mathcal{A}$, we can choose the system parameters such that:

1. *Completeness.* If the wireless medium is reliable and if $\mathcal{A}$ is passive, an authorized Reader $\mathcal{R}$ will identify any authorized tag $\mathcal{T}$ within its range with probability greater than $1 - \varepsilon$.
2. *Soundness.* $\mathcal{R}$ will identify a rogue tag as an authorized tag with probability less than ε.
3. *Anti-cloning.* A rogue reader will succeed in cloning an authorized tag with probability less than ε.

The security of Radio Frequency Identification mirrors to a large extend the security of interactive zero-knowledge proofs (IZKP), except that for the RFID setting: (*i*) the prover is a tag and has very restricted resources, (*ii*) the verifier is the back end server that shares private information with the prover, and (*iii*) a certain amount of knowledge is allowed to leak, provided it is not enough for the adversary to clone tags.

Definition 2. [3] A secure RFID protocol has *session-unlinkability* if for any $\varepsilon > 0$ and any adversary we can choose the system parameters, such that: given any two tag interrogations Int_1, Int_2 (not necessarily complete, or by authorized readers), where Int_1 takes place before Int_2, and a history of earlier interrogations, the adversary cannot decide with probability better than $0.5 + \varepsilon$ whether these sessions involve the same tag or not, provided that either:

– The interrogation Int_1 completed normally (successfully), or
– An interrogation of the tag involved in Int_1 completed successfully after Int_1 and before Int_2.

5.4 An informal security analysis of Gen2Sec

The EPCGen2 standard specifies a 16-bit RNG bounded by the constraints in Section 2. In Gen2Sec we propose to use 32-bit RNGs to thwart exhaustive search attacks and minimize collisions. To get a 32-bit number we could of course draw two successive numbers from a 16-bit RNG (as is done for cover coding a 32-bit password). But the resulting number will not exhibit sufficiently strong pseudorandom behavior for security (and will certainly be distinguishable from true random). To achieve a level of pseudorandomness compatible with the requirements of EPCGen2 we therefore must double the seed length of the EPCGen2 PRG. We have:

Theorem 1. *Gen2Sec is a* secure *RFID protocol that guarantees* session unlinkability *provided a cryptographically secure RNG is used.*

Proof. We briefly show that Gen2Sec satisfies the security specifications of Definition 1 and Definition 2 in the Random Oracle model (ROM). In the full version of this paper we shall show that the specifications are supported in the Universal Composability framework [6] using the approach in [23].

To prove the security of Gen2Sec in the ROM we must show that an adversary who can access the flows of protocol sessions (as random numbers rather than pseudorandom) from authorized Readers and Tags (modeled by stateful oracles) cannot succeed with probability greater than ε in generating the flows of a new session that is accepted by the Server. For this purpose we must establish the following:

Completeness. We have to show that every tag $\mathcal{T}$ shares at least one number with the server $\mathcal{S}$ (for synchronization) at all times. This holds because the values of the stored numbers are updated by $\mathcal{T}$ and $\mathcal{S}$ with each successful execution. If the previous execution of the protocol was not disrupted then $RN_1^{cur} = RN_1$ (in this case one *update* is needed); otherwise we may get $RN_1^{next} = RN_1$ (two *updates* are needed). Note that the numbers RN_4 and RN_5 are used only once. It follows that an authorized tag $\mathcal{T}$ will be identified by the server $\mathcal{S}$. There is a small probability of error ε, due to collisions.

Soundness. The adversary (a rogue reader) cannot guess the protocol flows because these are generated by a PRN. There is a small failure probability due to "lucky" guessing.

Anti-cloning. To clone a tag the adversary must get access to the seed of the RNG, which is never revealed: only the outputs of the RNG. Again, there is a small probability ε of guessing correctly some values of RNG.

Session indistinguishability. If for any two tag interrogations Int_1, Int_2 the first one completed successfully before the second, or there is an intermediate interrogation that completed successfully, then the tag will have updated the values of the numbers it stores. □

Concluding remarks. The EPC standard for Class 1 tags focuses on reliability and efficiency and supports only a very basic security level. Designing EPCGen2 compliant RFID protocols that are secure is particularly challenging. In this paper we have shown that three recently proposed EPCGen2 compliant RFID protocols fail to provide adequate security and are subject to impersonation and cloning attacks.

We proposed a novel RFID EPCGen2 compliant protocol that uses the numbers drawn from synchronized RNGs to provide secure tag identification and session unlinkability, whose security is reduced to the (cryptographic) pseudorandomness of the supported RNGs. The protocol is optimistic in the sense that when the adversary is passive only two rounds of communication are needed. When the Reader detects an anomalous flow then an additional round (two passes) is needed.

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